

Senate Bill 390
March 17, 2011
Presented by Dave Risley
Senate Fish and Game Committee

Mr. Chairman and committee members, I am Dave Risley, Fish and Wildlife Division Administrator of Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP). I am here in opposition to Senate Bill 390.

FWP opposes Senate Bill 390 for several reasons:

- SB390 raises the fee for a conservation license purchased by hunters and anglers
- SB390 mandates a method of wildlife monitoring without evaluation of cost or effectiveness
- SB390 mandates how contract money from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) must be spent, which is the prerogative of the USFWS
- SB390 assumes management of predator populations must be done using predator control methods versus using hunters (lions, bears, wolves)
- SB390 mandates contracting with USDA Wildlife Services for predator control activities, which results in a diversion of license dollars, and therefore has an impact of over \$20 million dollars.

Specific concerns are as follows:

This bill increases the cost of a conservation license purchased by hunters and anglers at a time when FWP is attempting to not raise the cost of licenses, especially in a piecemeal fashion. It also goes against this administration's direction of no new taxes or fees. Any license increase should be done as part of a broad, programmatic approach that looks at all needs and projections together.

The requirement to collar wolves assumes that this method will always be the best way to monitor wolf populations. In fact, in anticipation of reduced or no federal funding for wolves once they are delisted, FWP has been working with the University of Montana to develop a population monitoring method using wolf sightings by hunters and our existing harvest survey program. It appears that this patch occupancy method is fairly accurate, and a fraction of the cost. This isn't to say that FWP is ready to cease collaring today, but as time progresses, there could be alternatives to this method. But SB 390 and other bills like it would lock in only one method. This seems contrary to the intentions of the Legislature that wants to see state government working more effectively and efficiently.

The mandate to expend funds to control populations of predators seems to ignore the fact that we can and do use hunters for controlling populations of lions, bears, and hopefully soon, wolves. Why pay for that when people are willing to pay us for the opportunity and want the opportunity? As far as coyotes, funds for coyote control could only be used to control coyotes that are negatively impacting a population of antelope or deer; they cannot be used to control coyotes to reduce depredation on domestic livestock. Similarly, control of bears or mountain lions to reduce potential depredation of domestic livestock is a diversion issue.

I also question why we should use Montana hunter's and angler's money to fund a federal agency. In prior discussions with Wildlife Services they were only willing to do such work in areas where they were already doing predator control associated with sheep allotments, and in counties where they are authorized to do aerial control. They didn't have the resources to do separate wildlife management control work on top of their existing workload.

Finally, mandating that license dollars be used to contract with Wildlife Services results in a diversion of license funds, which could result in loss of up to \$20 million in Federal Aid the department receives.

FWP appreciates the support of the sponsor to dedicate funds towards management of predators that may be impacting big game populations, but for all of the reasons stated, FWP respectfully requests a Do Not Pass on SB390.